

# Review of CPA UK Strategy 2019-2025

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Introduction

This report presents the findings of an Academic Fellowship to review the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Branch Strategy 2019-2025. The purpose of the research was to explore the content of CPA UK's current strategy. We also reflect on how CPA UK can better support parliamentary democracy in the Commonwealth across the next strategy period.

### Key themes

Our findings and recommendations can be grouped according to the following key themes:

#### **1. *Institutional strengths and identity***

CPA UK has an enviable reputation as a provider of high calibre, cutting edge parliamentary strengthening activities. It is especially valued for its role as a relationship builder, establishing networks of officials and parliamentarians which provide ongoing support across the Commonwealth and overseas territories, and endure for many years. With the presence of similar organisations in the field, it is a good time to consider what the unique offering of CPA UK is and how this identity can be promoted and strengthened going forwards.

#### **2. *A balanced and flexible approach to supporting parliaments***

Flexibility has been a critical component of CPA UK's work over the current strategy period and staff should be very proud of the work they undertook during the coronavirus pandemic to continue to deliver high quality programmes online. Listening and responding to the needs of other parliaments has been a real strength and is demonstrated well by CPA UK's work with the Gambia National Assembly. However, as a membership organisation, CPA UK's work must also be driven by the interests of UK parliamentarians. UK MPs and Peers gain a great deal from their participation in CPA UK programmes, but there is scope to think more explicitly about how the UK Parliament could learn from others. In doing so, it can promote UK parliamentary participation in CPA UK programmes as being more about learning than teaching.

#### **3. *Rethinking themes and objectives***

Incorporating themes explicitly within the strategy for the first time has been one of CPA UK's biggest successes, bringing a clearer structure to its work. However, awareness of CPA UK's strategic objectives is not as visible among staff, particularly those less familiar with the strategy document as a whole. New

themes should reflect the changing issues facing Commonwealth parliaments and provide clear learning opportunities for all participants. Future themes also require broad and consistent support from UK Members, and associated trade-offs should also be considered if there are to be any changes to the current priority themes.

#### **4. *Acknowledging, realising and maximising impact***

Impact is a key means of establishing effectiveness and identity, but it has not been a traditional area of focus for CPA UK. There needs to be a more explicit link between the means of impact and the signifiers of impact. CPA UK's impact is strong but often indirect, informal, wide-ranging and diverse in nature and longevity. It is therefore not always possible to capture clear, quantifiable impact. Changes resulting from CPA UK's outputs are not always clearly identified and therefore do not inform good practice and future learning. Moreover, stakeholders do not always want to attribute 'causal' impact to CPA UK. It is therefore important to take a nuanced view of impact. This is especially important when considering that CPA UK is not just a membership organisation; it is also a good practice organisation.

#### **Future discussions**

CPA's 2019 - 2025 strategy enabled a focus on key areas of strength and to continue the relationship-building which is such a key pillar of its work. It has highlighted several areas in which this work could be further strengthened, in an increasingly crowded and resource-intensive field. It will be important to consider how CPA UK's work can be developed further, in which areas, and what the impact of this will be both internally (in terms of CPA structure, staffing and Member involvement) and externally (in terms of maintaining trusted lines of communication and support with parliaments).

We present 10 key questions to consider:

1. What is CPA UK's guiding purpose?
2. What is it that makes CPA UK stand out?
3. Which themes and objectives should be introduced or changed?
4. What are the trade-offs associated with changing themes and objectives?
5. Should content be organised into 'themes' and 'objectives' in a new strategy?
6. How can UK Members be most effectively engaged in new themes and/or objectives?
7. To what extent does a new strategy need to specify balance in CPA UK's work?
8. How best can multilateral and bilateral teams work in concert?
9. How can impact be better integrated into the CPA UK strategy?
10. Is a strategy the appropriate place for the work of CPA UK to be celebrated?

## INTRODUCTION

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This report presents the findings of an Academic Fellowship to review the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Branch Strategy 2019-2025. The purpose of the research was to explore the content of CPA UK's current strategy and to reflect on how CPA UK can better support parliamentary democracy in the Commonwealth across the next strategy period.

The current 2022-2025 CPA UK strategy document sets out three main objectives for the organisation's work: i) to strengthen parliamentary democracy, ii) to link Westminster with other Commonwealth parliaments, and iii) to use its values to ensure it is a leader in its field. These broad objectives sit alongside five priority thematic areas of focus (women in parliament, modern slavery, public accounts committees, security, and trade).

This report was developed in consultation with CPA UK staff and with the support of the Executive Committee. This independent review was an invaluable opportunity to take stock of CPA UK's work over the last six years and to consider future opportunities.

The independent research for this report was carried out between July 2024 and February 2025 by Dr Alex Prior (London South Bank University) and Dr Louise Thompson (University of Manchester), supported by the University of Manchester's Impact Acceleration Award and by London South Bank University. It included:

- i) Focus groups with CPA UK staff, across the three main teams: the Senior Management Team (SMT), the International Partnerships Team (IPT) and the Multilateral Partnerships Team (MPT).
- ii) Follow up interviews with key CPA UK staff across all three teams.
- iii) Interviews with UK Members of Parliament who have participated in CPA UK programmes, including current and former members of CPA UK's Executive Committee.
- iv) Interviews with parliamentarians and officials in Commonwealth parliaments.

Research updates were shared regularly with CPA UK staff over the course of the fellowship and were presented to the CPA UK's Executive Committee for discussion in November 2024 and February 2025. The authors are grateful to CPA UK staff for their time, and for engaging honestly, critically and constructively in this review exercise.

This document represents the views of the authors, and not the institutional views held by CPA, CPA UK, or any other CPA branch.

## 1 - INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHS AND IDENTITY

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### A strong global reputation for impactful work

CPA UK has a long history of working to support parliamentary democracy around the Commonwealth. As a consequence, it has an exceptionally strong reputation as a consistent provider of impactful specialist work.

This includes multilateral work which encompasses the five priority themes outlined in the 2019-2024 strategy; women in parliament, modern slavery, public accounts committees, security and trade. It also includes core CPA UK projects being carried out bilaterally, such as work with the UK Overseas Territories and crown dependencies. CPA UK's election observation missions, which have run for over a decade now, are world-leading. The annual Westminster Seminar has been attended by hundreds of parliamentarians. This stands out as one of the key activities which CPA UK is known for, and has often acted as an entry point into other CPA UK programmes. Although CPA UK sits within the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) group of CPA branches and serves as its Secretariat, its work stretches beyond this. Participants in CPA UK programmes regularly expressed their admiration for the organisation's global reach.

It is not simply the activities being carried out by CPA UK which contribute to this robust reputation. The commitment and expertise of CPA UK staff is also highlighted as a real strength, with their skill and flexibility ensuring that priority objectives and themes are implemented successfully. Internally, CPA UK has invested heavily in staff development schemes which has brought increased confidence across all teams. The organisation's handling of the coronavirus pandemic demonstrates this well, with programmes being quickly reconfigured so that they could be delivered online.

This cutting edge specialist work, delivered by a team of dedicated staff, is central to CPA UK's pre-eminence across parliamentary institutions around the world and sits at the heart of its institutional identity.

*'CPA is a known quantity. there's a calibre to it that they are so uniquely placed. I mean I still have Members come to my office to go, 'oh, CPA UK. You know, the little door in Westminster Hall?' ... And I think, you know, you can't brand that, nobody else can brand that.'*

Parliamentary Official, 2024

### A valued relationship builder

The impact of CPA UK's work can be felt in many areas of specific parliamentary activity. However, one area cited regularly by staff, parliamentarians and officials is CPA UK's role as a builder of parliamentary relationships across institutions. These relationships exist for officials as well as legislators, usually where participants in programmes have shared

areas of interest such as trade, or where they have found similarities in their personal or parliamentary situations (e.g. women MPs, parliaments in small jurisdictions). Relationship-building facilitates ongoing inter-parliamentary dialogue, creating support networks which provide crucial assistance to parliamentarians and officials, and help them to feel part of something bigger.

*'Bringing people together is maybe one of our strongest points of our work'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

Parliamentary work necessitates the building of relationships, but these are often contingent, temporary and fragile, based on the realities of party-based environments. By contrast, the relationships that CPA UK facilitates are not 'everyday' relationships. They have proven to endure over time, across huge areas, and across diverse cultures. Our interviewees spoke of networks and close friendships with their counterparts in other parliaments which are still functioning many years after they first met on a CPA UK programme.

*'It's the networking, really...putting a face to a name, which means you can phone them up and go "What on earth?! Help"'*

Parliamentary Official, January 2025

*'I had a WhatsApp message from the chair of a Public Accounts Committee in another jurisdiction saying help. I've been asked to look at this issue'*

UK MP, February 2025

The consistency of CPA UK's bilateral work, which sits alongside large multilateral activities, ensures that there is a permanent point of contact at CPA UK. Parliamentarians and officials from across the world describe the ongoing support they receive from CPA UK staff. This effectively complements the support networks gained from multilateral activities. Crucially, this relationship building does not only benefit international parliaments. It has also proven to be incredibly useful for parliamentarians and officials in the UK Parliament, who value the insights they gain on their own practice from engagement in CPA UK work.

### **Creating a distinct CPA UK identity**

It is clear that CPA UK is a unique organisation in terms of its resources and its work. Nevertheless, other organisations exist whose work is comparable to (if not in direct competition with) CPA UK (such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy) and whose activities may touch on similar priority themes.

*'...our area of work is getting more and more competitive. We have a lot of other partners across the world that work with a lot of our key partners as well, the UN, WFD, like just loads of other organisations too, so it's again trying to distinguish ourselves from them and their programmes, which sometimes can look a bit similar, and just trying to make sure that we've got that clear space carved out in our work'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

CPA UK is also based in the same city as CPA HQ, with the two organisations just a short walk from each other at Westminster. This makes it an ideal time for CPA UK to reflect on its unique offering, as well as its institutional identity.

*'One of the things that I do remember from different visits to places is that the CPA UK team almost have it on a constant repeat: 'We are CPA UK, CPA UK'...and their banners and getting the right information in the media releases and things because...it's not always completely clear'*

Parliamentary Official, January 2025

*'Whenever someone says thank you to CPA ...we're like 'no, no. UK - finish it off!'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

## **2 - BALANCING REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE WORK**

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During the current strategy period CPA UK has proven itself to be a very flexible provider which can adapt its work where needed in order to maintain its strategic objectives of strengthening parliamentary democracy. This has been evident in two areas across the current strategy period:

### **i) Delivering on the strategy during the coronavirus pandemic**

The current strategy was designed for face to face activities between 2019 and 2024, but the coronavirus pandemic prevented almost all of this work being carried out in person for a 2020/2021 and necessitated new ways of putting programmes together. Staff adapted very quickly to the changing circumstances, with a considerable amount of work being delivered to parliaments virtually. This was a difficult undertaking given the challenges of coordinating parliamentarians and officials in different time zones, who were familiar with very different online platforms, or had no experience at all. As the pandemic progressed, planned face to face programmes often had to be rescheduled to online sessions at the last minute to take into account changing circumstances on the ground, with some parliaments more severely affected than others. While initial work tried to emulate face to face programmes, CPA UK staff quickly learnt that online sessions could not simply replicate these and developed new strategies to try to maximise networking opportunities and dialogue.

There was a consensus among CPA UK staff that this was one of the main achievements across the strategy period. They were rightly proud of the flexibility they had shown in adapting their programmes of work and it is to their credit that the value and impact of CPA UK's work was maintained across this difficult period. These pandemic experiences have facilitated greater flexibility in CPA UK's offer to parliaments. Although CPA UK staff and participants have a preference for face to face work, familiarity with virtual events has helped to maximise budgets in what has been a difficult economic period for the UK more broadly.

### **ii) Responding to requests from parliaments**

Although CPA UK's multilateral programmes team have worked more consistently to prioritise the key themes outlined in the strategy document, this is balanced by the international partnerships team developing close relationships with parliaments on a bilateral basis. Staff work hard to understand the challenges facing parliaments, guided by the need to listen and understand. They try to highlight any shared experiences or challenges with the UK Parliament. These exchanges often happen informally, through social media tools between individuals. Staff described how they have established close relationships with officials and parliamentarians over a considerable period of time and how this has enabled them to be more effective in developing programmes of work which are timely and relevant. Work developed with the Gambia National Assembly is a good

example of this, with initial smaller scale activities developing into a much broader partnership as relationships between the two institutions grew.

*'...you can only really get that once you have sort of built up the relationship and there's a sort of degree of trust to talk about those kind of more challenging elements. And we've obviously also built up these relationships on the UK MP side as well'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

*'...we are pretty good at listening to parliaments and that's one of our strengths... our approach is more like what would be helpful if we were to work together rather than kind of coming in with a sort of authoritative voice I guess'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

The staffing structure of CPA UK, and the division of work between the multilateral partnerships team and the international partnerships team, has facilitated a balance between being reactive to other parliaments' needs and proactively developing work on the key strategic themes. This underscores the reputation of CPA UK as a global leader in key thematic areas such as modern slavery and public accounts committees, while also ensuring day to day support to strengthen parliamentary and democratic processes and adapt to circumstances on the ground which may change very quickly.

### **What could the UK Parliament learn from others?**

As a membership organisation, CPA UK's work is driven by the interests of UK parliamentarians. Its Executive Committee members are responsible for shaping and maintaining the overall direction of the organisation's strategy, while other UK MPs and Peers are involved in CPA UK programmes and events as participants and speakers. UK Members highlighted the benefits of taking part in these programmes, reflecting on how the insights they gained remained with them for many years. One MP spoke of a delegation she had participated in over a decade earlier and how the experience still resonated with their work at Westminster today. CPA UK programmes have a cumulative effect as UK Members share the knowledge gained from overseas visits with others. Some programmes are designed specifically with shared learning for the UK Parliament in mind. However, almost all programmes have incorporated opportunities for UK members to learn from their experiences.

*'We are very good as an organisation...at going round, telling the rest of the world how to be much better at recruiting more women...we've got the benefit of a huge organisation, much much bigger than many of the other parliaments in the Commonwealth, but I don't think we do enough self-reflection'*

UK MP, October 2024

However, there remains scope for CPA UK to focus more explicitly on the ways in which the UK Parliament could learn from other parliaments in order to strengthen its procedures and behaviour. Specific areas highlighted by UK MPs and Peers in which they would benefit from further support and inter-parliamentary learning included ethics and lobbying as well as scrutiny and accountability processes. This would be consistent with CPA UK's reflection on its position in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and an increased emphasis on learning rather than teaching.

### 3 - RETHINKING THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

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#### Core pillars guiding CPA UK's work

The current CPA UK strategy document sets out three main objectives for the organisation's work, alongside five priority thematic areas. Incorporating these themes explicitly within the strategy for the first time has been one of CPA UK's biggest successes, bringing a clearer structure to its work. The multilateral partnerships team has been recruited and organised on the basis of these five themes and they have proven crucial for all outward facing work and for the communication of this work.

*'The objectives [are] almost a way of working. So perhaps...we're doing it without actually realising that that's what we've committed ourselves to. Because that's what we do, we strengthen parliament, we link parliaments together...we're always talking about our values.'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

Awareness of CPA UK's three strategic objectives is not as visible among staff, particularly those at a more junior level who are less familiar with the strategy document as a whole. However, strengthening parliamentary democracy and building relationships with commonwealth parliaments is considered by all to be at the heart of everything CPA UK does on a daily basis. These objectives are particularly important to the international partnerships team in developing bilateral relationships with other parliaments. Crucially, staff feel that their choice of work is always consistent with, and justified (explicitly or implicitly) in light of these strategic objectives and wider themes.

*'Most people have an understanding of what our objectives are. Even if in practice, we don't actually know ... like if you asked us to name the three objectives probably.... we probably wouldn't be able to name them off the top of their heads. I think it's a lesser focus in terms of what's actually written down, but...I think we probably do follow that.'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

#### Prominence of existing themes

Some themes (PACs, women, modern slavery) were considered to be more 'big ticket' items than others (trade). Priority themes require the ongoing support of UK Members to champion them and drive the work from within. These groups of Members with the passion and/or expertise in a thematic area are relied upon to engage in CPA UK activities. This consistency is more difficult to maintain when a strategy crosses General Election periods. The high turnover of MPs in the 2024 General Election, for example, brought an absence of sustained Member support in some thematic areas such as security, where existing champions have stood down or lost their seats.

*'We do have election work as well and I've never really quite known where that fits in. So it's interesting, you know, should it be a theme?'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

There are additional aspects of CPA UK's work which are not currently recognised as themes, but have a strong thematic focus. These include election observation; a consistent and highly valued activity in which CPA UK engages. There are principles such as scrutiny and accountability which are not explicitly stated as themes or objectives but nevertheless broadly inform the work of CPA UK.

### **Themes for the future**

No concerns were voiced internally or externally around the content of CPA UK's objectives, though staff, Members and Commonwealth parliamentarians all suggested potential new themes to prioritise in the coming years. However, there was little consensus on what these new themes would be. Suggestions from international parliaments included trust in parliaments, climate change, and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Any new themes will need to be future proof, reflecting the changing issues facing Commonwealth parliaments and providing clear learning opportunities for all participants. Some international parliamentarians expressed caution over potentially important themes such as climate change as areas in which the scope for backbench work is perhaps more limited. Although these are pressing policy areas, they may not be the focus of day to day work of most backbench MPs.

*'I have attended the Women in Trade Workshop and again the networking opportunity was great, but it's hard for a backbencher to really advance trade discussions because that would be something that an executive member would have the authority to do. So whilst it was [a] great learning experience, it was difficult to take anything back that I could actually implement in my jurisdiction.'*

MP, November 2024

Future themes also require broad and consistent support from UK Members. They should be championed by more than one UK Member to ensure longevity across different parliamentary and electoral contexts. Having fewer themes could be preferable for this reason, and would also reduce the demand for participants in different programmes, preventing CPA UK staff and UK parliamentarians from becoming overcommitted. Some officials noted the frequency of email communications asking for participants in events (from both CPA UK, CPA International and similar organisations) as being at times overwhelming. Fewer themes and more time spent on longer events could be a solution to this.

*'Sometimes I'm not too sure who actually sends [email requests] to me. I get requests for people "can you please help out? There's a researcher doing this. We need answers to these questions". And it's just like "Oh my goodness, I'm trying to run a hung parliament.'*

Parliamentary Official, November 2024

Associated trade-offs should also be considered if there are to be any changes to the current priority themes. CPA UK staff have spent many years curating networks of contacts and channels of trust between themselves and other institutions. It would take time to rebuild these networks around new thematic areas and could affect the trust and support which individuals and institutions have built with CPA UK. CPA staff speak very positively about programmes which bring the work of CPA UK's bilateral and multilateral teams together. New themes could seek to facilitate this further.

*'I think the balance of work between the bilateral and the multilateral...could be brought out a little bit more. Because obviously I know that a strategy isn't supposed to be very explicit and it is therefore interpretable by the delivery organisation.'*

CPA UK Staff member, January 2025

Some interviewees suggested that new areas of strategic focus could be geographic rather than thematic, though this was more strongly opposed by others. It is clear however, that the Commonwealth has been an important factor in the development of the current strategy and that it must continue to guide the broader structure of CPA UK's engagement with parliaments. This strong geographical reach across the Commonwealth reflects the values of CPA UK, levelling the playing field between institutions of different sizes, different histories and different resources.

*'It's a recognisable aspect of the Commonwealth...the fact that you have got this great range of different contexts and the fact that there's kind of a quite a level playing field in that respect. You know that you've got really small countries able to sit at the table with bigger, internationally influential countries.'*

CPA UK Staff member, January 2025

Smaller geographic areas of focus have developed organically over the previous strategy period, with clear differences across regions in the breadth and depth of CPA UK's engagement with parliaments. Explicitly listing particular regions (or parliaments) within the strategy would be too restrictive and politically sensitive. CPA UK could perhaps discuss the development of long term partnerships with key parliaments or groups of parliaments (e.g. overseas territories, small legislatures) or consider whether it wishes to prioritise breadth or depth in its bilateral work. Is one more likely to bring a long lasting impact?

*'I think the balance of work between the bilateral and the multilateral...could be brought out a little bit more. Because obviously I know that a strategy isn't supposed to be very explicit and it is therefore interpretable by the delivery organisation.'*

CPA UK Staff member, January 2025

## 4 - ACKNOWLEDGING, REALISING AND MAXIMISING IMPACT

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### Defining and measuring impact

'Impact' is understood within CPA UK as a broad aim that leads to significant long-term changes that the work of CPA UK contributes to through a combination of outputs (delivery of services) and outcomes (changes resulting from outputs). Historically, defining and measuring impact has not been an area that has been the highest priority for CPA UK. Instead, there has been a greater focus on inputs and throughputs such as organisational activity and relationship building. Impact is a key means by which organisations can establish their effectiveness, as well as their identity (i.e. what an organisation is 'for'). It is therefore an essential element of organisational strategy, as well as reviews of strategy.

Despite the importance of impact, this term is not mentioned at all in the current CPA UK strategy. Key Performance Indicator reports are written and submitted annually, but these indicators and expected outcomes are not referred to. There needs to be a more explicit link made between the means of impact already established by CPA UK, and the impact that CPA UK has achieved and recognised.

*'Impact at the very best of times is almost impossible to monitor, particularly when you're going in for quality rather than purely quantitative and indeed qualitative can often be misleading anyhow. I think that CPA...it does have the obligation to try and understand what its impact is.'*

UK Peer, November 2024

CPA UK's impact is strong but often indirect, informal and thus difficult to measure. It is not always possible to capture a clear, causal narrative of impact in which CPA UK's activity was the only variable.

The work of CPA UK is wide-ranging and highly diverse. For example it is sometimes highly responsive (in the case of bilateral work) and sometimes highly proactive (in the case of multilateral work). In addition, it can range from short-term events to long-term relationship building. It is therefore not always possible to capture clear, quantifiable impact.

*'Sometimes the responses you do get back...[is] often stuff that you can't really measure. Like someone will say 'I now feel more confident to do this', a lot of it is based around confidence or 'I can now assert my authority', and that's amazing. But we can't really put in a report 'X amount of members now feel more confident', it's not concrete.'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

## Celebrating the work of CPA UK

CPA UK staff have strong examples of concrete impact. This includes constitutional changes in smaller territories, as well as CPA UK's work in the Gambia.

*'Other kind[s] of things that really kind of stood out is our relationship with the Gambia and supporting them after the 2017 presidential election. Working with them on so many different things, from advising their standing orders to supporting different committees, supporting the Commission of Agenda committee, all these different areas have come up. It's quite a big piece of our work which has been going on for years'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

However, this is not always recognised as impact. Instead it is simply acknowledged as (successful) activity, and as evidence of CPA UK's continued pre-eminence in its field. This is consistent with CPA UK's tendency to focus on inputs, throughputs and outputs rather than outcomes. Changes resulting from CPA UK's outcomes are not always clearly identified and therefore do not systematically inform future work. This means that CPA UK's own work is not integrated into a feedback loop that benefits best practice and future learning (and ultimately, strategy).

It is important to recognise the work of CPA UK and its value. This was reflected in discussions with CPA staff, with the following question being asked: 'are we too humble?'. Questions such as these suggest a disconnect between the work of CPA UK and its appropriate acknowledgement or communication. Nevertheless, the strategy may be best suited to guiding (rather than celebrating) the work of CPA UK. It is an open question as to whether a different document or resource is more appropriate for recognising and celebrating CPA UK's work and its impact.

Stakeholders do not always want to attribute 'causal' impact to CPA UK (and diminish their own agency). It is therefore important to take a nuanced view of impact to fully capture CPA UK's significance and contribution.

*'It's not going to be put in somebody's annual report. It's the conversation that you want to have across the table from the person who's providing security services to another parliament. Yeah. That's the valuable stuff'*

Parliamentary Official, December 2024

*'I'm quite proud whenever I've asked a Member to kind of say, well, you know, "what have you gotten out of it, that actually helps you with your job as an MP in Westminster?" No one's ever said nothing. They always have really kind of interesting insights they can say.'*

CPA UK Staff Member, July 2024

## Impact and identity

A focus on impact in a future strategy could bring a broader focus on what CPA UK does, and how they do it. It could therefore help to (re)define CPA UK's institutional identity and differentiate itself more clearly from competitors, as well as from CPA itself. Re-examining CPA UK's identity and functions would also facilitate a re-evaluation of core functions and their value. Building networks, for example, can be considered instrumental (i.e. a means to an end) or as an end goal in itself.

This is all highly relevant for discussing CPA UK's institutional identity: whether CPA UK is a relationship-building organisation, or an organisation that secures impact through building relationships.

*'In quite a few of the themes...we're broadly self sustaining networks. I mean, that's true on the Public Accounts Committee side. It's true on the overseas territory side, I think where we created a network which could then sustain itself even if we weren't still involved with it...we helped UK members find ways to engage and understand international issues and where they didn't they many of them did not have other opportunities to do that...I don't think [we] have a metric for that...the numbers we've engaged and the breadth of them and the diversity of them...We've had conversations with them that tell us that, but I think that's a sort of good soft indicator'*

Former CPA UK Staff Member, September 2024

The current strategy does not always provide a clear picture of outputs and outcomes, especially when looking beyond themes and examining multilateral and bilateral work. This is especially important when considering that CPA UK is not just a membership organisation; it is also a good practice organisation.

Embedding a recognition of the importance of measuring its impact, and of the nature of that impact, would be beneficial in guiding and recognising its work going forwards. It would also set CPA UK apart from similar organisations who do not include impact related measures in their current strategies (e.g. IPU, WFD).

## **FUTURE DISCUSSIONS**

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### **A clear narrative about CPA UK's work**

Discussions around CPA UK's institutional strengths and identity, and the impact of its work, suggests the need for a re-examination of its own narrative (and whether a single narrative exists). We suggest that the new strategy incorporate a clearer narrative about CPA UK's work; in other words, a characteristic pattern of activity that reflects a particular 'message' and a set of values. Discussing and demonstrating this narrative would highlight CPA UK's institutional strengths more clearly.

Key questions:

- What is CPA UK's guiding purpose?
- What is it that makes CPA UK stand out?

### **Themes and objectives**

Any changes to the themes and/or objectives in the CPA UK strategy should reflect a number of realities. Firstly, changes should reflect, in turn, the constantly-changing issues facing Commonwealth parliaments. Secondly, any changes should provide clear learning opportunities for all participants, and take account of the broad and consistent support that is required from UK Members. Thirdly, changes should take account of necessary trade-offs, for example in terms of relationship (re)building.

Key questions:

- What are the trade-offs associated with changing the strategy's themes and objectives?
- Should strategic content be organised into 'themes' and 'objectives' in a new strategy?
- How can UK Members be most effectively engaged in new strategic themes and/or objectives?

### **Balancing reactive and proactive work**

There may be some key areas (geographic and/or thematic) which CPA UK wishes to prioritise. However, these should not be prescriptive to the extent that they curtail or restrict existing work, or prevent new areas of activity.

The next CPA UK strategy will need to acknowledge and establish a balance between multilateral and bilateral activities. Similarly, it will need to demonstrate and reflect the

need for both reactive and proactive work with Commonwealth parliaments and British Overseas Territories. Both of these considerations - multilateral/bilateral and reactive/proactive - reflect the breadth of CPA UK's work. Relationship building and maintenance is highly proactive, whereas strategic responses require a reactive approach by their very nature.

Key questions:

- To what extent does a new strategy need to specify balance in CPA UK's work?
- How best can multilateral and bilateral teams work in concert?

### **Recognising the work of CPA UK and its impact**

It is important to celebrate CPA UK's work (in particular by acknowledging its impact). There is scope for discussion as to whether a strategy should be where this work is celebrated (rather than simply guided, for example) but it is important that CPA UK do so in some capacity.

As well as being (quite rightly) a source of institutional pride and solidarity in its own right, celebrating the work of CPA UK has considerable external value. It is a means by which CPA UK's institutional identity (and narrative) can be made more clear and communicable. This may help to encourage others - inside and outside of the organisation - to come forward and provide testimony on CPA UK's work and its impact.

Key questions:

- How can impact be better integrated into the CPA UK strategy?
- Is a strategy the appropriate place for the work of CPA UK to be celebrated?

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